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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000237

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND LABOUR PARTY STAKES ITS CLAIM FOR 2005 ELECTIONS; RUFFLES SOME FEATHERS

REF: A. WELLINGTON 70  
[B](#). WELLINGTON 58

Classified By: Political and Economic Counselor Katherine B. Hadda,  
For Reasons 1.4(B,D)

[1](#). (C) Summary. New Zealand's governing Labour party released its list of Members of Parliament, which outlines the rank by which MPs will enter Parliament after the 2005 election. The list reveals Labour's confidence in the face of an upcoming election, with almost all sitting MPs receiving high rankings. Shifts in ranking versus the 2002 list, however, reflect the concerns of Maori MPs, who received higher ranks after expressing concern over the Maori Party challenge in their constituencies. MP George Hawkins, the embattled Police Commissioner, pulled out of the List immediately after it was released when he was ranked 25th - the lowest spot for sitting members of Cabinet. In addition, MP John Tamihere, who remains under a cloud despite being cleared of actual financial impropriety, has not put forth his name for a List seat. Instead, Tamihere says, he will either stave off his Maori Party opponent in a run for an electoral seat or retire from Parliament. Labour supporters Shane Jones, David Ching, and Maryan Street have scored high list rankings - the first two above a number of sitting MPs. Labour's List assumes an increase in their overall Parliamentary representation, demonstrating the party does not believe the Opposition's attacks on the Government's health, education, and crime policies poses any real threat. End summary.

Maori MPs Grab Higher Ranks  
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[2](#). (SBU) New Zealand's governing Labour party released its list of Members of Parliament on March 21. Under MMP, voters have two votes - one for a constituent MP, and one for a Party. The List nominates individuals to fill seats based on the Party vote in the 2005 election (ref A.) The list reveals Labour's confidence in the face of an upcoming election, with almost all sitting MPs receiving high rankings. Shifts in ranking versus the 2002 list, however, reflect the concerns of Maori MPs, who received higher ranks as a reward for remaining loyal through the foreshore and seabed conflict of 2004 that resulted in the creation of the Maori Party. Many Maori MPs had expressed concern over the Maori Party challenge in their constituencies, and a high ranking assures their return to Parliament. One noticeable absence from the List is Nanaia Mahuta, a Maori MP who threatened to sink Labour's controversial foreshore and seabed legislation in 2004, but ultimately toed the party line. Mahuta was 19th on the 2002 list, but may have decided to follow fellow Maori MP John Tamihere's example and rely on winning her constituent seat.

[3](#). (U) John Tamihere is another obvious omission from the Labour list. Suspected of financial misconduct over his dealings with a Maori trust (ref B), Tamihere was cleared by the Serious Fraud Office of any wrongdoing, but an investigation into the dealings of two of his previous employees is ongoing. In what could be seen either as an act of defiance or an act of principle, Tamihere has declined a place on Labour's list, stating that he will either ward off challenges by the Maori party for his Tamaki Makaurau electorate seat or be content not to enter Parliament at all. Tamihere has been unusually quiet in public statements, only rarely displaying the straight talk and temper that are his hallmarks as the "red blooded male" of the Labour Party. He has been angling for a return to his Cabinet portfolios, but press reports claim PM Clark will not allow him to return to Cabinet before the election.

What's In A Number?  
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[4](#). (U) Minister of Police George Hawkins, recently the target of effective Opposition attacks on the state of emergency police responses, pulled out of the List after it was announced, protesting his ranking as 25th - the lowest ranked member of Cabinet. (Note: Hawkins is ranked 11th within Cabinet.) Despite this move, Hawkins is likely to again win his Manurewa seat, which he won by almost 13,000 votes in [2002](#). Labour supporters Shane Jones, Maryan Street, and

David Ching have scored high list rankings - the first two above a number of sitting MPs. Shane Jones has distinguished himself as the Waitangi Fisheries Tribunal Chairman, and Maryan Street is an Employment Relations Manager as well as a former Labour Party President. Labour President Mike Williams said Chinese New Zealander Steven Ching's inclusion reflected "the changing face of New Zealand," noting that Ching's placement as number 42 on the list "should assure the business leader a seat in the House."

17. (C) Comment: While careful leaks indicated which fresh faces were to be added to the List, Labour may have ruffled some feathers internally with its final ranking of sitting MPs. Clark's prowess at damage control, however, should insure that there is no long-term damage to the party's support. She has already bluntly stated the party line that the ranking of Maori MPs was due to their seniority, and not pressure from the nascent Maori Party. By putting forth a list that by its nature assumes an increase in Labour's representation after the election, Labour appears to believe it has fended off successfully Opposition attacks on education, health and crime policies, and has begun to consolidate its plan of attack.  
Swindells